

## Shaving by Richard Blanco

### Introduction:

*"[My father] died when I was 22. I never really got to have an adult relationship with him, so a lot of the poetry is to have some kind of connection with him, with the tiniest little memories I remember of him — sort of having a conversation with my father across time and space, in many ways."*

- Richard Blanco

### Directions: Follow the steps provided below:

1. Read "[Shaving](#)" by Richard Blanco, paying close attention to the literary elements and techniques Blanco uses to develop the speaker's complex associations with the ritual of shaving.
2. Read through the poem again, this time focusing on individual words throughout the piece that, in your opinion, contribute most heavily to Blanco's message.
3. Pick three words from each of the three stanzas, words that you feel are most important to the essence of each stanza and the poem as a whole. Then jot them down in the middle column.
4. In the final column, discuss how your three words all intertwine to create meaning in each of the three stanzas.
  - Don't simply discuss how each word works in the context of the larger piece; discuss how the three words all relate to one another conceptually and how they work together to create meaning in Blanco's poem.
  - **Your response should consist of no less than four complete sentences.**

**An example is provided below:**

### Example:

*\*Don't use these three words as your own! Come up with your own ideas!*

| Poem                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Most Important Words                                                                                                                                                                            | Discussion of Words                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <p><i>*Choose the <u>three</u> most important words in the stanza, words that - in your opinion - contribute the most to the stanza's significance and function in the poem as a whole.</i></p> | <p><i>*Discuss how/why each of the words relate to &amp; work in tandem with one another to contribute to not only the effectiveness of the stanza by itself, but also to Blanco's meaning of the work as a whole.</i></p> <p><i>Also, do not simply discuss each word in isolation; make sure to discuss how all of the words work together to create meaning.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <p><b>Shaving</b><br/>by Richard Blanco</p> <p>I am not shaving, I'm writing about it.<br/>And I conjure the most elaborate idea—<br/>how my beard is a creation of silent labor<br/>like ocean steam rising to form clouds,<br/>or the bloom of spiderwebs each morning;<br/>the discrete mystery of how whiskers grow,<br/>like the drink roses take from the vase,<br/>or the fall of fresh rain, becoming<br/>a river, and then rain again, so silently.<br/>I think of all these slow and silent forces<br/>and how quietly my father's life passed us<br/>by.</p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. silent</li> <li>2. mystery</li> <li>3. forces</li> </ol>                                                                                              | <p>Blanco starts the poem by bringing up a seemingly mundane activity: shaving. Even though he's not actively shaving at the moment, the mere concept is able to conjure a series of interrelated images that the act reminds him of. The speaker's tone is philosophical, as he muses on the slow, invisible process of growing a beard, labeling it a form of silent "labor," suggesting that there are unnamed, mystic agents at hand that even he is not aware of. He continues on, outright using the word "mystery" to describe the wonders of this hidden, magical act of nature. Near the end of the stanza, the speaker refers to the "forces" behind the process, the invisible figures that create the everyday wonders of life, ultimately reinforcing that there is something heavenly and powerful constantly working behind the veil to create something beautiful and meaningful in life,</p> |

even in the form of death, as he will soon go on to broach in the later stanzas.

| Poem                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Most Important Words                                                                                                                                                                     | Discussion of Words                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <i>*Choose the <u>three</u> most important words in the stanza, words that - in your opinion - contribute the most to the stanza's significance and function in the poem as a whole.</i> | <i>*Discuss how/why each of the words relate to &amp; work in tandem with one another to contribute to not only the effectiveness of the stanza by itself, but also to Blanco's meaning of the work as a whole.</i><br><br><i>Do not simply discuss each word in isolation; make sure to discuss how all of the words work together to create meaning.</i> |
| <b>Shaving</b><br><i>by Richard Blanco</i><br><br>I am not shaving, I'm writing about it.<br>And I conjure the most elaborate idea—<br>how my beard is a creation of silent labor<br>like ocean steam rising to form clouds,<br>or the bloom of spiderwebs each morning;<br>the discrete mystery of how whiskers grow,<br>like the drink roses take from the vase,<br>or the fall of fresh rain, becoming<br>a river, and then rain again, so silently.<br>I think of all these slow and silent forces<br>and how quietly my father's life passed us by. | 1.<br>2.<br>3.                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| I think of those mornings, when I am shaving,<br>and remember him in a masquerade of foam, then,<br>as if it was his beard I took the blade to,<br>the memory of him in tiny snips of black whiskers                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | 1.<br>2.<br>3.                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

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| swirling in the drain—dead pieces of the self<br>from the face that never taught me how to shave.<br>His legacy of whiskers that grow like black seeds<br>sown over my cheek and chin, my own flesh.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                |  |
| I am not shaving, but I will tell you about the<br>mornings<br>with a full beard and the blade in my hand,<br>when my eyes don't recognize themselves<br>in a mirror echoed with a hundred faces<br>I have washed and shaved—it is in that split<br>second,<br>when perhaps the roses drink and the clouds form,<br>when perhaps the spider spins and rain transforms,<br>that I most understand the invisibility of life<br>and the intensity of vanishing, like steam<br>at the slick edges of the mirror, without a trace. | 1.<br>2.<br>3. |  |